



"The Bible does not argue for the existence of God. It reveals Him."
—Roy E. Swim

06-Jun-25

Revelations at Mount Sinai

Sometimes, places—geographic locations—are significant far beyond just their latitude and longitude. They stand out because they mark locations relevant to our lives. They are birthplaces, marriage venues, places where we raised our families, made our mark, and buried our dead. We identify with them. I call myself a Yinzer—from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—despite having lived there for only my first two years, because my parents and their parents lived there for several generations. In some ways, the place leaves its mark on its inhabitants.

A very few places are simply holy because [God](#) makes them so. Jerusalem is the Holy City. It is the place around which the entire Bible revolves. It was likely the site of the Garden of Eden. God instructed Abraham to sacrifice [Isaac](#) there as a type of Jesus Christ's future sacrifice for our redemption. God chose the city for David to place His throne over all Israel. It was the place of both Temples, where the Shekinah Glory entered and dwelt in the Most Holy Place. [Christ will return](#) to set foot on the Mount of Olives and take Jerusalem as His capital when He sets up His Kingdom. And New Jerusalem will descend from heaven as God's dwelling place for eternity.

Places may be special because of historical events that occurred there: a treaty signed, a battle fought, an empire launched, art created, heroes birthed, and truths uttered, among other acts. In America, the sites of [the World Trade Center](#) in New York City and a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, have become hallowed places since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Some cemeteries and battlefields create the same aura. Sites like London, Rome, Tokyo, Berlin, and Paris have played such monumental roles in their nation's history that they inspire a kind of reverence, a certain sense of otherness that shouts, "Weighty things happened here!"

Mount Sinai is such a place. The Bible mentions it dozens of times as "Mount Sinai," "Sinai," "Horeb," "the mountain of God," "the mount of the LORD," "Mount Paran" (poetically), etc. Ironically, we cannot even be sure where it is! The traditional site in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula has long been considered the location where God thundered the Ten Commandments. Yet another mountain in Arabia, located across the eastern arm of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aqaba, is gaining increasing numbers of supporters. Biblical clues can be marshaled to support either.

However, for our purposes, determining the actual location is not as important as what we know occurred there—not once, not twice, not three times, but perhaps four times!

On the first occasion, [Moses](#) "led his flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him" ([Exodus 3:1-2](#)). This, of course, is the famous "burning bush" incident when God called Moses to serve Him, telling him to go to Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery.

While not diminishing that work, the most crucial part of the conversation may occur in two verses deeper into Exodus 3. First, in verse 6, God says, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then, after Moses asks Him what name he should use for Him before the Israelites, God answers, "I AM WHO I AM. . . . Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" ([Exodus 3:14](#)).

The vital detail is that *God reveals who He is* to Moses and, through him, to the Israelites. He is the Eternal God, the Person who was, is, and always will be. Moreover, He is the personal God of their hallowed patriarchs and, thus, the God of the entire nation of Israel. As such, they are special to Him. He is looking out for them and will act mightily to deliver them and bring them into their own, productive land. This revelation should have filled the Israelites—and us, as the [Israel of God](#) ([Galatians 6:16](#))—with hope and [faith](#).

The second occasion occurs only months later, when Moses brings the freed Israelites to Mount Sinai ([Exodus 19:1](#)). After they prepare themselves, God appears in a fearsome spectacle atop the mountain, giving them the Ten Commandments, His fundamental law ([Exodus 20:1-17](#)). *God reveals His standards of right and wrong*, codifying them on stone tablets to be placed in the ark of the covenant, picturing them as the basis of God's judgment from the Mercy Seat. These laws, already present in the world, are associated with the covenant He made with them, in which, among other things, God expounds specific statutes under the basic law.

The third occasion happens not long thereafter, when Moses returns up the mountain following Israel's idolatry with the Golden Calf. The great leader of Israel is discouraged, asking God, "Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people" ([Exodus 33:13](#)). In verse 18, he asks, "Please, show me Your glory." God agrees, and when He does, it happens in a surprising way:

Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, [merciful](#) and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in [goodness](#) and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and [sin](#), by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." ([Exodus 34:5-7](#))

In answer to Moses' request for Him to show him His way and His glory, God instead expounds "the name of the LORD," that is, His character that His names express and glorify. They go beyond the law He had commanded earlier, expanding into what Paul later calls "righteousness apart from the law . . . even the righteousness of God" ([Romans 3:21-22](#)). He proclaims not just some of His divine prerogatives but also the godly virtues that a person who has found grace in His sight must imitate in faith. Thus, *He reveals not only more about Himself but also more about the way of life His followers must live.*

The fourth occasion takes place in the life of the prophet Elijah when Israel's Queen Jezebel threatens to kill him ([I Kings 19:1-2](#)). He flees south into the Kingdom of Judah and beyond until he comes after forty days and nights to "Horeb, the mountain of God" (verse 8). Twice, God asks him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ([I Kings 19:9](#), 13). Each time, the prophet replies in a hurt, despondent way, bringing up his zeal for God, his fear, and his mistaken opinion that he was the last believer in Israel.

So, God instructs Elijah to do what Moses did about six centuries earlier so that He could orchestrate a theophany for his—and our—benefit. God sends a mighty wind, a powerful earthquake, and a blazing fire, and after each of these stupendous works, Scripture informs us that "the LORD was not in" it ([I Kings 19:11-13](#)). After them, God sends "a still small voice," and by the absence of the additional comment, the reader knows that God *is* in the still small voice.

This episode is another revelation of God and His way, showing that *He predominantly works through peaceful, personal persuasion* rather than through mighty, miraculous, all-encompassing, frightening acts. He will not bully His people through raw fear or terror. Instead, He speaks to them in [love](#) and [patience](#), using compelling words and personal interaction to convince and guide them. This method ties in with the Son's name, the Word (*Logos*), as shown in [John 1:1](#).

A possible final occasion appears in [Galatians 1:16-17](#), where Paul mentions that after his conversion, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I

went to Arabia." Later, he writes of "Mount Sinai in Arabia" ([Galatians 4:25](#)). It is possible he received similar training to Moses, Elijah, and the twelve apostles there from Christ Himself, a speculation made more probable by his declaration that he did not commune with humans but, we assume, a Spirit Being. He writes in [I Corinthians 15:8](#), "Then last of all [Christ] was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time."

He came away from his time in Arabia with a zeal to preach [the gospel](#) among the "Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" ([Acts 9:15](#)). In addition, he possessed a unique perspective on God's way, which God used in the book of Acts and fourteen epistles to expound "some things hard to understand" (II Peter 3:15-16). In Arabia, *Christ revealed the deep things of God* to Paul, particularly the finer points of law, grace, covenants, prophecy, and principles of application to Christian living.

With each revelation of Himself and His way from Sinai, God added depth to His people's understanding, even to the most complex questions and circumstances they would have to face. Mount Sinai seems to be a place where He chose to reveal new things about Himself, sharpening the perspectives of His prophets and apostles on the God they served and giving them the ability to teach His people how to walk the narrow path to His Kingdom. It is no wonder the ancients called the place "the mountain of God."

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

New Transcripts

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From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Eden, The Garden, and the Two Trees \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God has often allowed different groups of people to use different names for the same geographical location (i.e. Mount Hermon and Mount Zion describe the same location). A major perennial theme throughout the Bible involves copies, shadows, symbols, and patterns, with the original pattern residing in the heavens and the copies made on the earth. The objects in the tabernacle derive their original form and pattern from God's pattern in Heaven. In the same respect, God is the original and we are copies. The river flowing eastward out of Eden (God's personal residence on this earth) and the river flowing from God's throne (Revelation 22:1) are both symbolic of God's Holy Spirit. Cain, the real progenitor of Babylon, wandered eastward, systematically away from God. Conversely, Abraham's descendents migrated west and northwest, eventually occupying the western-most countries. Jerusalem (the location of Mount Zion as well as the Gihon Water Course and underground spring - a virtual never-ending aquifer of water) occupying the centermost position among the nations becomes the likely location of the Garden of Eden and the likely location for the Heavenly Jerusalem. Mesopotamia is ruled out as the locale of the Garden of Eden.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[A Stone Named Jerusalem](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Catholic Church did not forbid keeping the Passover until AD 325. The

controversy over Passover or Easter boils down to either following Scripture or Roman tradition.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study (Friday 06-Jun-25) will be **Acts (Part Twelve)**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday** (EST) and all day Saturday.

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